

Headline	Bombings in Songkhla have brought new twist in conflict		
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Bombings in Songkhla have brought new twist in conflict

IN the past, bombings and acts of terrorism were confined to the three southern Thai provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani.

Bomb blasts involving cars and motorcycles were rampant in the three provinces between 2009 and last year. Thai separatists were always blamed for the violence and made the scapegoat for everything that could go wrong in the restive south. The latest bombings in Songkhla province, another southern Thailand province that borders Malaysia, have taken a new twist.

Sunday's triple bombings, within hours of one another, saw two police stations in Sadao and Padang Besar (Thailand) destroyed and a section of a hotel ripped apart. While it was expected no group would claim responsibility for the blasts, the proximity of the latest bombings to the Malaysian-Thai border has raised eyebrows.

According to Universiti Utara Malaysia political analyst and foreign affairs expert Dr Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, the carnage was unexpected since Songkhla and another southern Thai province, Satun, were not home to Thai separatists.

He said the violence in the south had always been confined to Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani.

"The people in Songkla and Satun are also mostly Muslims, but they have never been known to pick a fight with the Thai authorities, let alone fight for autonomy or independence like their counterparts in Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani.



"The residents in Songkla and Satun are a relatively happy lot and enjoy a good relationship with authorities in their provinces."

He said the residents and businesses in Padang Besar, Satun and Dannok in Songkla enjoy good economic fortunes because of their close proximity to Padang Besar in Perlis and Bukit Kayu Hitam in

Kedah respectively.

"The four towns are basically across the border. There is a high volume of visitors and business transactions between the four border towns.

"The Thais, including Muslim residents in Songkla and Satun, are basically content as they have little economic qualms, unlike their counterparts in Narathiwat, Yala and Pattani, whose provinces border the Kelantan and Perak hinterland.

"As such, the latest blasts should raise a red flag for Malaysian and Thai authorities," he said, adding that the car park blast at Lee Gardens Hotel in Hat Yai, Songkla district, on March 31 last year was an exception.

Azizuddin, who is also the dean of UUM's College of Law, Government and International Studies, said it would be too easy to blame the latest bombings on Thai separatists from the three trouble-prone southern provinces.

He did not rule out that separatists from Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani were trying to stoke fire among the contented Muslims in Songkla and Satun to join them for autonomy or self-rule. He also did not dismiss the possibility that the bombings were the work of opportunists, both political and factions among Thai separatists, trying to rock and take advantage of the fragile situation in Bangkok.

Until someone lays claim to the latest bombings or is identified as the responsible party, it will be difficult to ascertain the motive.

However, the Thais in Songkhla and Satun may not be able to continue enjoying uninterrupted good fortune from Malaysians who keep Dannok and Hat Yai high on their holiday list.